

Introduction

Missouri's public child welfare system has embarked on significant changes that will have long-term, positive impact on the safety and permanence of Missouri's most vulnerable children and their families.

Over the past eighteen months, Missouri's child welfare system received much attention, following the tragic death of a child in foster care. Having the public's attention on vulnerable children and the child welfare system presented a unique opportunity for a range of stakeholders to learn more about child abuse and neglect and the service delivery system that helps protect children.

The Governor, legislature, judiciary, state auditor, and media each used their respective processes and leadership to examine safety issues and share recommendations. In addition, the child welfare agency conducted internal reviews, commissioned an external review and employed problem-solving teams. These processes resulted in well over 100 recommendations. Some of these were issued in reports, newspaper editorials, legislation, and executive orders. Children in Missouri deserve this leadership, attention and support.

Consequently, action has been taken. The Governor's executive order reorganized the Department of Social Services, creating a Children's Division with a primary focus on vulnerable children. All recommendations have been analyzed and the following priorities set:

- Increase the utilization of Kinship Care as the preferred placement for children, when a child's safety is assured.
- Expedite permanency for children through more inclusive Family Support Team meetings.
- Prioritize and appropriately handle calls to the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline.
- Enhance background checks for foster parents and emergency placements.
- Improve coordination between the Departments of Mental Health and Social Services to increase access to mental health services for children.
- Increase Performance-Based Contracting.
- Enhance activities that will lead to increased accountability with stakeholders of the child welfare system.
- Enhance internal activities that will lead to increased accountability of the child welfare system.
- Enhance activities that help prevent child abuse and neglect and foster care drift.

These priorities are guiding agency action. Several are significantly changing how the public agency operates in meeting its statutory and regulatory mandates. Working with the courts, other public agencies and the community, a number of the recommendations are in various stages of implementation; and more are in the planning phases.

All of the examination, planning and action are occurring in the context of the most challenging economic times for our state. Missouri has faced unprecedented cuts in

financial and staff resources. There can be no greater agency mission than the one charged to the public child welfare agency — helping to keep children safe from abuse or neglect. Increased accountability for our mission continues to drive the pace of change while increased partnership with families, communities and other systems that work together to protect and ensure the safety of children will ultimately make the difference.

The federal government is also a vital partner in these efforts. The recently established, “Child and Family Service Review,” developed by the United States Administration for Children and Families is welcomed. Most importantly, for the first time, the review focuses on outcomes and sets federal benchmarks high. While no states have “passed” all the benchmarks, in fact, the majority of states have passed one or in some cases two, it indicates where all states need to be if our country’s children will be safe and grow up in nurturing homes.

This state assessment is the first component of the review. The Children’s Division appreciates the efforts by community stakeholders throughout Missouri and staff who served on the statewide assessment team to develop this report and the recommendations contained within. These recommendations will be carefully considered in light of the priorities set following the reviews mentioned above and receipt of sufficient financial resources, allocated appropriately on how and who can best perform the work. These recommendations offer another perspective of what is needed to create a system that Missouri’s children and families deserve.

Overview of the Missouri's Children's Division

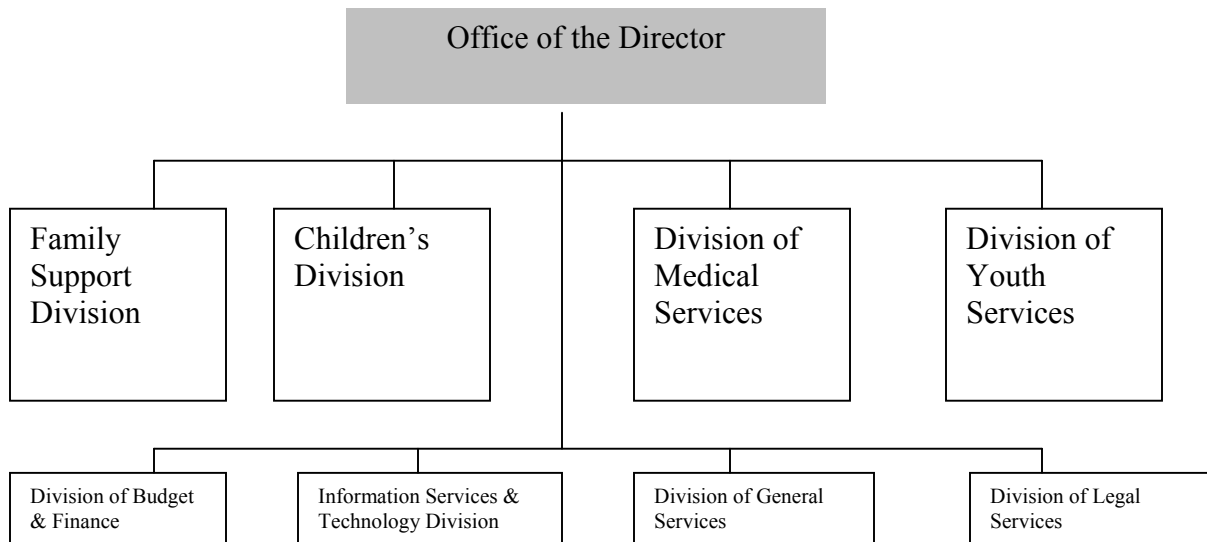
In Missouri, programs aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect, keeping families together, and encouraging self-sufficiency and independence are state administered by the Department of Social Services. The Department of Social Services is administered by a director who is appointed by the Governor and approved by the state Senate. This department director, in turn, appoints division directors.

Department Structure

Missouri is undergoing a reorganization of the Department of Social Services. On April 4, 2003, the Governor's Executive Order (03-03) was finalized and went into effect August 28th, 2003 directing the reorganization. The following changes have occurred under the new reorganization:

- The Income Maintenance functions currently in the Division of Family Services and the enforcement function currently in the Division of Child Support Enforcement are being joined under a new Family Support Division.
- The Workforce Development functions in the Division of Family Services and in the Division of Child Support Enforcement (Parents Fair Share) will move to the Department of Economic Development.
- The Family Support Payment Center function with the Division of Child Support Enforcement will move to the Department of Revenue.
- The Children's Services functions currently in the Division of Family Services, will become the Children's Division within the Department of Social Services.

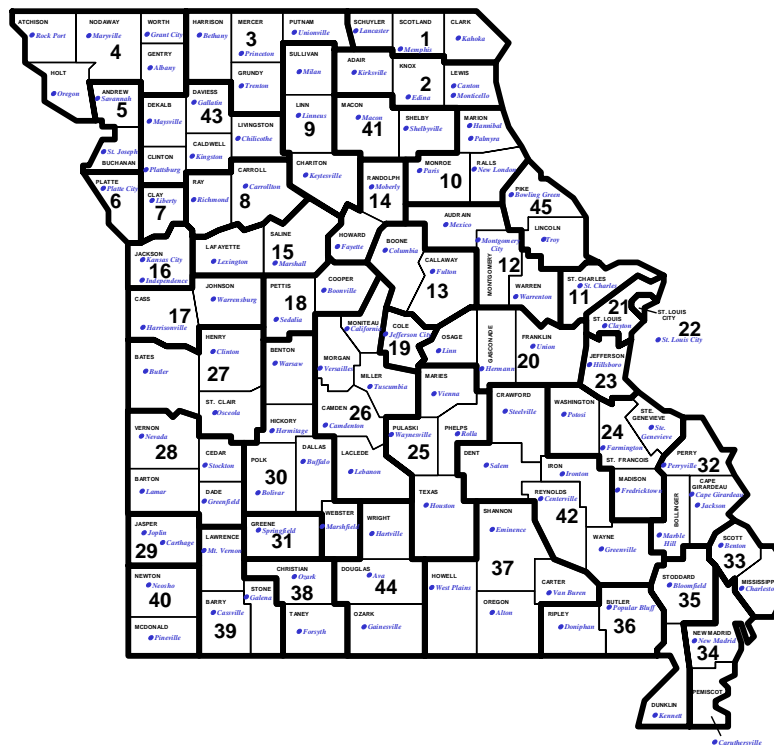
Below is the current organizational chart of the Department of Social Services.



Division Structure

While the Executive Order for re-structuring was effective August 28, 2003, and the budget reflecting the changes became operational on July 1, 2003, transitional activities will occur throughout the state fiscal year 2004. Missouri has 114 counties plus the City of St. Louis, which by statute, requires maintaining an office in each county. Each office employed a county director to oversee both Children's Services and Income Maintenance. County Directors varied in experiential background, education and clinical expertise. A decision was made to administer Children's Services within Missouri's forty-five judicial areas since there is a close partnership on child welfare with the juvenile courts. It was believed that continuity of practice could be better maintained if each circuit had oversight by a Circuit Manager. The Circuit Manager position would require an advanced degree (where available) and experience in the child welfare field. The Circuit Manager's job criteria will enhance the clinical support to Children's Services workers when making critical decisions for children. The map below divides Missouri into the forty-five circuits, each with a circuit manager.

Missouri's 45 Children's Division Circuits



Child Protection Services

It is well recognized that child abuse and neglect can produce long term destructive effects upon a child. Intervention, at times, becomes imperative to prevent further abuse and/or neglect and to promote functional behavior by individuals and families. All Children Welfare Programs in Missouri are state level administered. One of the most significant changes for children in Missouri occurred when The Child Abuse and Neglect centralized hotline became operational in 1975. All abuse and neglect hotline reports are made to the Central Statewide Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline Unit, or otherwise known as the Central Registry Unit. Once screened and classified, they are transmitted by telephone, or computer terminal, to the appropriate county Children's Division office for further action as appropriate.

During the 1997-98 legislative sessions, Missouri Senate Bill 961 was passed that established expansion of the flexible-response-child-protection system for the entire state. In summary, this delivery approach is designed to focus the investigation efforts of the Children's Division and law enforcement on cases that would be a violation of law. The remaining families are served through a comprehensive Family Assessment in order to address any service needs.

Families who are investigated and those who receive a Family Assessment are entitled to prompt and effective delivery of services in order to address their individual child/family needs. An investigation of each report, excluding reports on educational neglect, must be initiated within 24 hours of the receipt of the report. Investigations of reports that list educational neglect as the sole allegation are initiated within 72 hours. All Investigations and Family Assessments are to be completed within 30 days unless documentation is provided for a delayed conclusion. When appropriate, Children's Division offers preventive and protective social services on a multi-disciplinary basis in cooperation with the Juvenile Court and other public and private agencies.

The primary goals of the Child Protection System are to:

- (1) Ensure the protection of children from abuse or neglect; and,
- (2) Provide this protection to the child and family in the most appropriate and efficient manner possible by collaborating with and better utilizing state, community and family resources.

Family Support Services

Families entering the child welfare system receive case management services that are referred to as Family-Centered Services. The Family-Centered Services model acknowledges the importance of conceptualizing the family as a system that is constantly interacting with other systems in its environment. The emotional, sociological, and environmental circumstances of the family and its members must be considered.

The goal of these services is to assist the family in changing, as quickly as possible, conditions that bring, or could bring, harm to the children, and preventing placement out of the home.

Intensive In-Home Services

Intensive In-home Services, previously known as Family Preservation Services, is a short-term, intensive, home-based, crisis intervention program that offers families in crisis the alternative to remain safely together, averting the out-of-home placement of children. Families that have a child or children at imminent risk of removal from the home due to neglect, abuse, family violence, mental illness, emotional disturbance, juvenile status offense, and juvenile delinquency are screened for Intensive In-home Services. Services are provided in the family's home or other natural setting. Families are assigned one principal specialist who is responsible for spending eight to ten (and more if needed) hours per week, in face-to-face, direct contact with the family. The Intensive In-home Services program combines skill-based intervention with maximum flexibility so that services are available to families according to their unique needs.

Family Reunion

Family Reunion Services is a short-term, intensive, family-based program designed to reunify children with their families who are in out-of-home care and who, without intensive intervention, are likely to remain in care longer than six months. The goals of Family Reunion Services are to assist a family in removing barriers to the return of their child(ren), assist in the transition of returning the child(ren) to the family, and to develop a plan with the family that will maintain the child(ren) safely in the home for at least one year following the intervention.

Alternative Care Services

Kinship Care Program

Relatives or non-related persons, who have a close emotional relationship with children, who are in out-of-home care, provide kinship care foster homes. Kinship is defined as: Persons related by blood, marriage or adoption including parent, grandparent, brother, sister, half brother, half sister, stepparent, stepbrother, stepsister, uncle, aunt, or first cousin. It also includes those non-related persons not living in the same household but whose lives are intermingled with the child and appears as one of a blood relative. Kinship care is the least restrictive family-like setting for children requiring out-of-home placement. Kinship care is the placement of preference and should, if at all possible, be pursued prior to any other out-of-home placement arrangement.

Foster Care Program

Foster parents are individuals who meet all licensing regulations as set forth by the Division in order to provide family foster care, a temporary home for children who have been removed from their families. The foster parents are considered team members along with Children's Division staff, the parents from whom the child was removed, and professionals who have a common goal of establishing a plan for permanency and safety for the child.

Medical Foster Care Program

Children's Division also administers a Specialized Foster Care Program. This program addresses the needs of two distinct groups of children, medically fragile, and behaviorally challenged, who would otherwise require institutional care, in order to meet their needs. The Medical Foster Care Program was established to provide care and treatment to a foster child with acute medical problems or severe physical/mental disabilities and the intent of this program is to assure that a child is cared for in the most appropriate and least restrictive setting. The program will assist the special needs child to reach a goal of permanency, and serve his/her special needs and best interests.

Behavioral Foster Care Program

Behavioral Foster Care is a specialized foster family placement program designed for children suffering moderate to severe behavior problems. These children require a family setting that can provide greater structure and supervision. These children have sometimes experienced multiple placements due to their unacceptable behavior and/or uncontrollable behavior in previous unspecialized out-of-home care placements. A goal of the Behavioral Foster Care program is to provide children with moderate to severe behavior problems with an individualized, consistent, structured family setting in which they can learn to control behaviors which prohibit their being able to function in a normal home setting and in society.

Career Foster Care Program

The Career Foster Parent Program provides full time care by a foster parent for children with multiple, complex needs. These foster parents are paid a higher rate to compensate them for caring for children full time rather than seeking outside employment. It was developed as a result of seeing an influx of children with diverse and complex needs which were not appropriately met through existing out-of-home care placement resources. These children experienced multiple placements as they were moved from foster family to emergency shelters and back again in an attempt to secure stability. Such moves were often expensive and very traumatic for the children. The program is also responsive to the needs of children who previously have been hospitalized, placed in highly structured setting, and/or experienced multiple placements. A goal of the program is to provide children with serious behavior and emotional disorders with intensive individualized intervention in a family and community based setting.

Residential Treatment Program

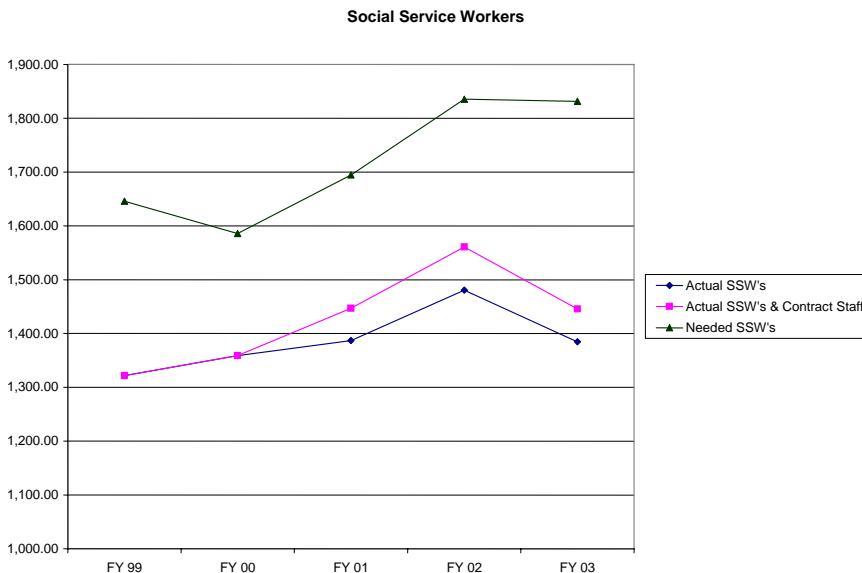
Some children are diagnosed as having emotional and/or behavioral disorders, which preclude living in a family home setting. These children may require a structured, institutional setting and placement with residential child care agencies for treatment. Children with the most severe problems are placed in residential treatment, and they are placed temporarily. Our goal is to assure children are provided appropriate treatment services and when they are able to function in a less restrictive setting, such as; returning to their own home, placed in an adoptive home, placed with a guardian, or prepared to live independently in the community.

Adoption Services

When it is not possible or in the best interest of the child to return to the biological family, consideration is given to placing the child for adoption. Missouri law identifies the Division as one of the child placing agencies that may place a child for adoption, and establishes time frames for the completion of court ordered/requested adoptive assessments.

Staff Reductions

Missouri is experiencing the worst economic conditions in more than a decade. The staff reductions began at the end of the Social Services Block Grant during State Fiscal Year 2001 (SFY-01) which resulted in the reduction of 115 front line workers and 55 supervisors. Since that time the Children's Division has experienced periodic hiring freezes during SFY-02 and SFY-03. Missouri's financial forecast appears to have little growth in tax revenues for SFY-04. The Children's Division was forced to decrease spending in some areas to compensate for demands in other program areas. These decreases included some discontinuation of Juvenile Office Liaisons, and contracted case management caseload limits with some cost reduction. Administration, travel and office equipment expenses have faced budget reductions for several years consecutively.



The table above depicts actual number of direct service workers in comparison to COA standards (as represented in the "needed SSW"). The table below represents the front line supervisor's ratio for the past several years. As the chart reflects, if the needed number of field workers were fully staffed, the burden on the supervisors would increase significantly. The supervisors are responsible for on-the-job training of new hires and case consulting and reviews. The ten to one ratio would be unmanageable.

Fiscal Year	Actual Supervisors	Need Based on COA standards	Percentage Staffed	Actual Ratio	Ratio if workers were fully staffed
SFY-99	171	235	72.72%	7.73 to 1	9.63 to 1
SFY-00	180	227	79.26%	7.57 to 1	8.83 to 1
SFY-01	204	242	84.33%	6.79 to 1	8.30 to 1
SFY-02	209	262	79.89%	7.07 to 1	8.76 to 1
SFY-03	183	262	69.76%	7.59 to 1	10.03 to 1

Approach to the Statewide Assessment

As Missouri embarked on the mission of writing a statewide assessment, a couple of resources were considered. First, the Children's Division inventoried all of the information available from recent reviews. This included reports from the Commission for Children's Justice, the Dunn-Connelly investigative report commissioned by the Governor, the state auditor reports, Senate Interim Committee, State of the Judiciary speech, the survey for employee excellence, the peer record reviews, the practice development reviews, the Missouri Child Welfare Outcome Measures, the annual child abuse and neglect report, and consumer surveys. This collection provided a wealth of information about how the Division functions, recommendations for improvement and how the child welfare system is perceived by communities and stakeholders.

Second, Missouri wanted to gain stakeholders' perspective from many geographical areas of Missouri and from many disciplines. Stakeholders were chosen from the Department of Mental Health, Department of Health, Department of Public Safety, Division of Youth Services, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, university partners, Guardian Ad Litem, court personnel, adoptive parents, foster parents, contracted providers, advocacy groups, faith community as well as Children's Division employees from all program areas.

Therefore, Missouri created a team of external and internal partners. The group was divided into two teams and reviewed policy, data, and recommendations from other review bodies to evaluate how well we were serving families and children. Discussions focused on strengths, barriers and potential solutions for improving practice. The results from the roundtable discussions are located at the end of each section.

Missouri is very grateful to all the people, listed below, who participated in the development of this statewide assessment.

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